

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9223
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AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0497

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, LA
SUBJECT: SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LAOS

REF: VIENTIANE 341

1. A SOURCE RESIDENT IN SAVANNAKHET TOLD US APRIL 29 THAT THE SECURITY SITUATION IN SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE WAS STILL VERY BAD (REFTEL). HE SAID THAT INSURGENT AMBUSHES ALONG ROUTE 9 WERE COMMON AND EVEN INCLUDED A RECENT MACHINE GUN ATTACK ON A CONVOY ESCORTING AN LPDR VICE MINISTER.

2. THE SOURCE CONFIRMED THE REPORT WE HAD PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED THAT THE SWEDISH ARMY ENGINEER MAJOR SENT TO INSPECT THE SITES FOR THE BAILEY BRIDGES SUPPLIED BY THE SWEDISH AID PROGRAM HAD BEEN REFUSED PERMISSION TO VISIT ANY OF THE SITES BECAUSE OF "SECURITY." OUR SOURCE SAID THAT THE BRIDGES THEMSELVES HAD HAD TO BE SHIPPED BY AN INDIRECT ROUTE BETWEEN
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SAVANNAKHET AND SENO. THE SHORTEST ROUTE (ROUTE 9) BETWEEN THESE TWO TOWNS LED THROUGH A FORESTED AREA INFESTED WITH INSURGENT ACTIVITY. AS A RESULT, THE BRIDGES HAD HAD TO BE TRUCKED THROUGH MORE OPEN COUNTRY TO A POINT ON ROUTE 13 TWENTY KILOMETERS SOUTH OF SENO AND THEN NORTH TO THEIR DESTINATION.

3. WE ASKED THE SOURCE WHETHER THE SWEDISH MAJOR'S MOVEMENTS MIGHT HAVE BEEN RESTRICTED SO THAT HE WOULD NOT BECOME AWARE OF THE MANY VIETNAMESE TROOPS KNOWN TO BE ALONG ROUTE 9 IN SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE. THE SOURCE SAID THAT THIS COULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE, BUT THE FACT WAS THAT THERE WERE NOW FEWER VIETNAMESE IN EVIDENCE IN SAVANNAKHET TOWN. LOCAL SPECULATION WAS THAT THEY HAD BEEN SENT SOUTH AS PART OF MOVEMENTS CONNECTED WITH THE VIETNAMESE-CAMBODIAN CONFLICT.

4. OUR SOURCE SAID THAT AT THE TIME OF THE LPDR TAKE-OVER IN 1975, 80 TO 90 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE IN SAVANNAKHET WELCOMED THE CHANGE. HE SAID THAT NOW 80 TO 90 PERCENT OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE OPPOSED THE LPDR. HE CITED FOOD SHORTAGES, THE VIETNAMESE PRESENCE, AND HEAVY-HANDED POLITICAL INDOCTRINATION AS THE MAIN REASONS FOR THE GREAT CHANGE IN POPULAR FEELING.

5. A LAO SOURCE RESIDENT IN SAVANNAKHET REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE RESISTANCE ELEMENTS THERE WERE INDEED MORE ACTIVE LATELY. HE SAID THAT WITHIN THE PAST FEW MONTHS THE RESISTANCE SEEMED TO BE BETTER COORDINATED AND WERE EQUIPPED WITH NEW UNIFORMS.

ROBERTS

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